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FAITH AND BANISHMENT
THE ARTISTIC CREDO OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

by Paul Jaskunas
English Honors Essay, 1994

In 1932 Katherine Anne Porter wrote to her brother from Paris, where she was living happily, about walking along the Quay and buying old maps of the New World: "I have already a French map of America made in 1631, and a French map of Virginia dated 1640. They are beautiful and inaccurate and I mean to have a lot of them." (*Letters of Katherine Anne Porter*, 78) The image of the old, absolute map floated right off the page as I read; it seemed to serve as the perfect metaphor for something in Porter's fiction that I had not yet been able to describe metaphorically: the determined and inspired impulse to create order that mediates the fearful space between the reality of New Worlds and the perception of the individual. The role of the artist, as defined in Porter's fiction and nonfiction, is akin to that of the map maker who, working from her unique vantage point and from the vision of those preceding her, re-draws the boundaries, reshapes the landscape of individual consciousness. Each generation of artists, she believed, must not intentionally speak for a new age of understanding or the latest ultimate truths. Rather, the artist stands alone, necessarily a voice of dissent, creating a self-defined order in the context of communal pressure and the stream of time. Her writing articulates a steadfast sense of her mission as an artist and it is this mission I want to explain. Her letters and essays discuss it in straightforward terms, while the artistic ramifications of her credo are given the movement of narrative in the mythical initiations from innocence to experience which so often form the nexus of her stories.

Porter's interest in moments of initiation stemmed from her belief that, as she told an audience in Paris in 1934, "the truth of art is got by change." (*The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter*, 440) In this speech she said that the inspiration for the novel she was then working on, *Legend and Memory* (which was to become "The Old Order" sequence), was her highly subjective understanding of her past. The creative process has little to do with accuracy, but with the assertion of the private imagination in the context of external change: "No memory is really faithful. It has too far to go, too many changing landscapes of the human mind and heart, to bear any sort of really trustworthy witness, except in part." (CE, 440) Her short fiction is pervaded by a faith in memory and the artist's ability to revise it. It cannot be said that most of Porter's work focuses on a dissonance between the past and the present, but there is a sense in her fiction

that those forces which exist independent of the artist necessitate an imaginative order which mediates the tensions between external realities and the "hard unwinking angry point of light" of the self. This need was what making art was about for Porter. It was about creating order out of change, about re-mapping the self in the midst of evolving, "beautiful and inaccurate" definitions. Her stories focus on moments of passage from innocence to experience, from ignorance to knowledge, because in instances of such change identity becomes vulnerable to forces beyond its control: communal expectations of women, mortality, societal moral codes. These moments define the artist's relationship with communal understanding of experience and therefore appealed to Porter's vision of the artists as a voice of individuality, order, and unique understanding.

Much criticism on Porter explores the significance of very clear dichotomies in her work that pit one way of understanding experience against another. Such criticism is quick to locate tension between the past values and those of the present, between the traditionalist world views and a more modernist one. In *Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development* Robert Brinkmeyer uses a primitivist/modernist scheme to discuss the Mexican stories, for example, and he examines the stories about the American South in terms of the "frontier" between the "traditionalist" viewpoint and the modernist. He writes that Porter "strove to maintain in her consciousness and her fiction what she saw as the procreative dialogue between southern traditionalism and northern modernism." (Brinkmeyer, 124) There is plenty of material to merit an analysis based on such temporal duality, based on one world view pulling against another. Porter, who was raised in rural Texas but lived most her life in modern, urban environments, wrote during a time of significant social and cultural change. In her introduction to *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* she wrote that her work was "what I was able to achieve in the way of order and form and statement in a period of grotesque dislocations in a whole society when the world was heaving in the sickness of a millennial change." She was keenly aware, in her fiction and nonfiction both, of major differences between her generation and that of her parents'. She wrote in a letter after returning to the South from Europe about the look of "race" among the older people---they all shared features, and looked strong and durable while the younger generation looked "indecisive." (*Letters*, 150) In much of Porter's fiction there are clear

dichotomies between the vision of the past and that of the present ("Old Mortality"), between a Catholic world view and a "primitive" one ("Maria Concepcion," "Virgin Violeta"), or between individual freedom and the security of traditional, communally accepted female roles ("Old Mortality," "The Cracked Looking Glass"). Such dichotomies are helpful in exploring surface tensions in Porter's work. They are in no way inappropriate, but in relying on the language of collective and vague schools of thought they fail to explain why Porter wrote stories. Though she was often very politically active, she was not one to champion a movement. Nor did she write to reveal a crisis between one way of seeing and another. It would be a hard task, for example, to come up with any decent understanding of a "modernist" way of understanding based on Porter's fiction; it simply isn't there.¹ Analysis of Porter's work based on the fundamental assertion of conflicting modes of thought, while it may be useful in explicating certain stories, does not correlate with Porter's vision of history, human progress, and the arts.

Porter's essays and letters express a cynicism towards the notion of revolutionary, cultural upheaval and social change. Speaking to the Women's Club of Paris in 1934, she argued that, fundamentally, the artist's role is not to speak for or prophecy historical movements. In this speech she explained how she refused to get caught up in any movement such as the Lost Generation which, she believed, consisted of solipsistic writers with a false notion of national crisis. Nor would she subscribe to any nationalist approach to literature. She argued that the American literary community's current effort to canonize such writers as Twain, Emerson, and Melville and to label them as "typical" American writers, was derivative of a fallacy: "Now there was a time, or so legend insists, when there was a stable, settled world of society, when everybody thought, felt, and believed the same thing. This was never true, but it has become the fashion to say so." (CE, 436) There is no such thing as a typical American writer, she argued, for the rift between the traditionalist past and the modernist present is an exaggerated, if not

¹ The temptation of the schematic duality leads Robert Brinkmeyer to confuse fine criticism with statements like the following: "'Maria Concepcion' celebrates the deep-seated powers of the instinctual self and the traditional community to resist the usurping forces of modern civilization." (Brinkmeyer, 48) The relationship between modernity, Catholicism, and adultery, however, are left rather fuzzy. By relying on this opposition he reduces Maria Concepcion's act to one vague set of principles defeating another.

imagined one. Any artist who does her job correctly will be in no way typical of a time period: "...the artist is usually too busy and too preoccupied with his own undertaking to worry much about whether he has got into the right tradition, or, indeed, into any at all." (CE, 437)

This skepticism regarding modernism is exemplary of Porter's philosophy regarding history, in general. In the essay, "The Future is Now," she refutes the very American myth of a continual, linear progression of the human race. She explains how her fears about an article on atomic warfare are soothed by the mere sight of a couple walking arm in arm in the street, a man polishing his table in a window, and "a quieting sense of the continuity of human experience on this earth." (CE, 198) The grand proclamations of technological progress of the modern era, Porter writes, are truly undermined by the contradicting setbacks; if we can send a man to the moon, we can't get rid of the garbage properly. Similarly, she sees no reason to be more outraged by the atom bomb than by old cruelty that flung arrows, hand grenades, or fired machine guns: "Our protocriminal then was the man who first struck fire from flint, for from that moment we have been coming steadily to this day and this weapon and this use of it." (CE, 202) The history of the human race is not one of progress, but of repetition and the continual emergence of prototypical behavior.

But Porter does not leave the reader in a spirit of cynicism. At the end of the essay she articulates an impetus for art-making: "And yet it may be that what we have is a world not on the verge of flying apart, but an uncreated one---still in shapeless fragments waiting to be put together properly." The essay suggests that Porter's creative impulse was not one to seize on the crisis of a modern era, but one to assert a continuity of human experience. In the same letter in which she wrote about buying old maps in Paris, she described her pleasure in living in a town that appreciates its history of aesthetic accomplishment: "I have a feeling of continuity, of things beautifully done for their own sakes, a strong live source of belief in life, that goes on and will allow me to go with it." (*Letters*, 79) It's easy to mistake this appreciation for the past as a nostalgia for a lost age. Porter did not write out of a melancholic memory of collective experience, but out of a credo that celebrated the individual's need to create order out of the continual changes that life demands people undergo. Porter was a sophisticated artist and a long way from Texas when she wrote about the South; her memory of the specifics of

her childhood cultural milieu was vague and uncertain. (She could not remember in 1935 the names of the parts of a horse, for example [*Letters*, 127]) Her inspiration, rather, was born of an understanding of personal and prototypical initiations. In the famous essay, "'Noon Wine': The Sources," Porter locates the seeds of the story as several moments from her childhood---brief glimpses of people who eventually became characters. The moments were important because they were, in their own way, initiatory for Porter; they alerted her to a new sensation or knowledge about the world. She describes the moment in which she saw a woman in her grandmother's parlor, the woman who would become Mrs. Thompson, as

a spiritual enlightenment, some tenderness, some first awakening of charity in my self-centered heart. I am using here some very old fashioned noble words in their prime sense. They have perfect freshness and reality to me, they are the irreplaceable names of Realities. I know well what they mean, and I need them here to describe as well as I am able what happens to a child when the bodily senses and the moral sense and the sense of charity are unfolding, and are touched once for all in that first time when the soul is prepared for them; and I know that the all-important things in that way have all taken place long and long before we know the words for them. (CE, 482)

Just as she relies on "old fashioned noble words" in her essay, her stories often focus on prototypical initiations, not to be confused with the "old-fashioned sentimental way of thinking" on which Miranda of "The Old Order" was raised. "The Old Order" and "Noon Wine" both portray individuals struggling to create and maintain order. I will present Mr. Thompson and Sophia Jane as examples of how the artistic impulse may be either encouraged or destroyed by the trials of initiation. These characters make for an antithesis against which other stories in Porter's canon may be analyzed. Mr. Thompson will serve as our prototypical failed artist while Sophia Jane is the successful one; the difference between the two is a security in self-knowledge, a bravery in the face of initiation.

From motherhood to death, Sophia Jane is a force of order, creativity, and stability. As a head of a household, she establishes a farm, an orchard, and works hard to feed her children and grandchildren. She watches over

her "completed works" with Nannie, catching their every move. When she visits her son's farm as Grandmother, she brings an end to disorganization, dirtiness and laziness. But she didn't always play this role, a role of experience and knowledge. Porter's description of her childhood and early marriage in "The Journey" articulates a state of innocence and ignorance enforced by the tyrannical gender codes of the "old order." Her cousin Stephen, whom she would marry, leaves home for an education; as she imagines his experience "the sweet dark life of the knowledge of evil caused her hair to crinkle on her scalp." (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, 335) Sophia Jane remains at home, dreaming in innocence about losing her virginity, "her sole claim to regard, consideration, even to existence." The dreams bring on moral suffering and leave her "disordered and terrified" because she has been taught that her femininity is shameful. Her state of adolescent disorder is the product of a dissonance between an instinctive understanding of womanhood and the false self she presents to (and is presented with by) her immediate community. When asked about her daydreaming she quotes poetry or hums a musical phrase to mask the truth. Her passage into experience is not, however, marked by marriage in typical fashion; in married life there remains a lack of order and self-fulfillment. The husband, with his "lack of aim and failure to act at crises," wastes the family finances in speculation, and, despite the "race of procreation," the sexual partnership fails to satisfy. "Not until she was in middle age, her husband dead, her property dispersed, and she found herself with a houseful of children, making a new life for them in another place, with all the responsibilities of a man but with none of the privileges, did she finally emerge into something like an honest life." (CS, 336) This "honest life" refers to a self-knowledge, a realization of her role as creator. Her initiation is one of independence from men, and the world of experience is one which she may put together herself. Her escape from innocence is an escape from self-denial, and it gives her the knowledge necessary to establish a new order, to create her own stability, and to experience life in a spirit of ownership. She did not own the grief for her husband's death, for example, until she recognized his likeness in a grandchild, until the grief manifested itself in her own creation. This creative impulse is bound to her womanhood, but at the same time is free of the bonds that society attaches to gender.

In her "honest life" Sophia Jane, who cannot live her husband's dream

of owning a sugar refinery, establishes a new farm in a new place and provides for her family. But her creation is necessarily vulnerable to change, disorder and loss. The incident of the runaway boys marks another initiation of sorts. As they tell her they were headed to Louisiana to east sugar cane and she feels their bones beneath their skin, "she felt her heart break in her breast...It was not that she was incapable of feeling afterwards, for in a way she was more emotional, more quick, but griefs never again lasted with her so long as they had before. This day was the beginning of her spoiling her children and being afraid of them." (CS, 339) This initiation is about the discovery of scarcity, and about the close relationship between death and creativity that pervades Porter's fiction. Her efforts to establish a farm and to provide necessarily drain energy; the raising of her family simultaneously creates order and leads to the break-up of family bonds, to disorder. She fears her children because she knows they are hers but that they have their own hungers and need for self-fulfillment. The boys' plea for sugar cane indicates the resurgence of the father's lost dream, a desire of which she held no control. Entrance into the realm of experience brings on new pressures of scarcity and time.

The Grandmother responds to these pressures in the spirit of the artist. She will grow sugar cane in Texas, and she will seek out better wives for her sons when they begin to marry inadequately. She will raise a set of motherless grandchildren, and she will make visits to her children as they begin to disperse, offering advice and suggesting changes. Hers is an imperfect and chaotic creation. The day she dies she demands improvements in a son's garden and wants to take out a wall in his house. Her changes will be tolerated but always reversed; her creative energy will be exerted and will achieve a little something, but ultimately in vain. What, then, is the old order and where is it to be found? It is in the dark chest that holds all those scraps of embroidery carefully prepared by the Grandmother and Nannie in their old age. Here is the myth that speaks the truth for her, that explains her understanding of what life is, has been, and ever will be. The sewing symbolically represents a knowledge of memory and an ordering of experience: "So they talked about God, about heaven, about planting a new hedge of rose bushes....and often a scrap of silk under their hands would start them on long trains of family reminiscences." (CS, 328) Nannie and Sophia Jane know that times change, know that the younger generations have failed

their own in many ways. Nevertheless, they harbor a faith in the cyclical pattern of history and in the providence of their beliefs: "...by the mysterious logic of hope they insisted that each change was probably the last; or if not, a series of changes might bring them, blessedly, back full-circle to the old ways they had known." (CS, 327) They are said to "love their past," despite its bitterness and trials, because it holds for them not a steadfast, unquestionable moral order (for they do question it, privately), but the memory of initiations. The story of Sophia Jane's life shows how these events force an imaginative self-definition that gives strength to the creative impulse and the drive to sustain order. This energy is born out of the same faculty that pieces together the random patches of cloth into a cohesive fabric.

While Sophia Jane lives an "honest life" in which initiation and change proves liberating, the hero of "Noon Wine" passes through an initiation without understanding it and fully imagining its self-defining implications. In her essay "St. Augustine and the Bullfight," Porter makes a distinction between adventure and experience; adventure is something done merely for pleasure and thrill, "for the illusion of being more alive than ordinarily," while experience "is what really happens to you in the long run; the truth that finally overtakes you." (CE, 92) It is experience, past events that are truly understood, that can become the heart of successful fiction, she writes. Mr. Thompson undergoes a great deal but fails to understand it clearly and, as he was a failed farmer, becomes a failed storyteller, unable to convince anyone of his innocence, including himself, the most important audience of all.

The first part of this short novel is about the transformation of chaos and entropy into channeled and creative energy. Under Mr. Thompson's reign the farm is littered with broken and dismantled machinery, rotting lumber. The chickens lay their eggs anywhere but where they should, the milk often goes bad, and the barn and gate are falling apart. Helton's work is characterized by an earnest and successful effort to contain the energy of the farm; the chickens hatch their eggs in the proper place, the fallen fruit goes to the livestock, the ears of corn that fall off the wagon are picked up for feed, the manure is used to fertilize the garden. In short, Helton is the blind force of creativity, order and stability in the story. His order is independent of any other. (His response to Mrs. Thompson's offer to attend church: "I got work.") His appearance serves to highlight that which his employer is not.

Some critics read Helton as a sort of psychological double belonging to Mr. Thompson, a bodily manifestation of that which he lacks, an aspect of the farmer's fractured identity.² Helton knows where everything is, he knows how to do the work, and does not act as if he were a stranger who must make himself known to the family. He seems strangely at home and foreign at the same time. But Mr. Thompson never does get to know his hired hand, never does crack the mysteriousness that surrounds him from the moment he walks through the broken gate, and he seems entirely satisfied to keep it this way. Helton teaches Mr. Thompson nothing about himself and pushes him deeper into his state of self ignorance, his profound and captive innocence.

The characteristics of this innocence are defined by the relationship between Mr. Thompson and Helton. From the beginning, we know that Mr. Thompson dislikes having to actually pay for hired help, and as the story progresses it becomes clear that the family will benefit from Helton's labor more than he will from the employment. Helton does not eat much at the dinner table, he works harder than his employer, and all his money goes to his mother in North Dakota. This creative force seems to require no self-indulgence; he is not a consumer of energy but a producer of it. The Thompsons, on the other hand, are often eating his butter, his corn bread and generally consuming the product of his labor. After being punished by Helton for touching the harmonicas, the two boys "ate warily...the cornbread sticking, the buttermilk gurgling, as it went down their gullets," while Helton has not yet come for supper. (CS, 241) The Thompsons, then, like the innocents of Eden, receive and enjoy the fruits of a mysterious creative force. The incident of Helton's throttling enforces this relationship. Like the God of Genesis, there seems to be one thing only which can upset Helton. The boys' handling of the harmonicas signifies an infraction of Helton's order and necessitates their banishment from the well-weeded and prosperous garden. They are delivered into the weak and uncertain discipline of their mother and are soon , once again, transformed into their corruptly innocent,

² Darlene Harbour Unrue uses this theory interestingly in her discussion of "Noon Wine." Mr. Thompson has a "preconscious" knowledge of his relationship with Helton and Hatch, she explains. The hero is trapped between Hatch, who articulates his inner darkness, and Helton, who mirrors an unrealized aspect of his personality. My analysis differs not in outlook but in emphasis; Mr. Thompson's state of innocence is one of self-ignorance that is articulated primarily by the aura of mystery surrounding both Hatch and Helton, rather than by the psychological connections between the three men. (*Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction*, 40-45)

animalistic selves. Mrs. Thompson watches from the window, struck by their simple nature and wonders what they could have done to deserve such fierce punishment. The meaning of the sin is tied up in the symbolic import of the harmonica and Helton's song. The tune is associated with hard work and achievement but is ironically about laziness, indulgence and sloth. It speaks to Mr. Thompson's nature. The music is said to become, fittingly, as natural as the family's voices over time. (CS, 236) The harmonicas and Helton's song symbolize a knowledge of the Thompson's real condition. Just as the family knows nothing of the tune and eventually stops hearing it all together, Mr. Thompson is aware of decline but blames the farm's troubles on his wife's weakness, and defines himself and that which he is capable on the basis of appearance. His ownership of the farm is ultimately only in name and not action or understanding, and the truth of the Swede's music remains unattainable. Similarly, the boys' father fails to recognize the similarity between himself and his offspring. Like the children, Mr. Thompson is prone to behave unruly (drinking, pinching Mrs. Thompson's behind), is not disciplined, and is an "ignoramus" when it comes to the "big Swede." Mr. Thompson proves himself, then, to be a corrupt innocent in this ignorance of his nature and his dependence on the powers of an outside creator of order.

He necessarily falls from his precarious and guilty grace. As seen in "The Journey," Porter views creative energy as being a response to and necessarily intertwined with forces of disorder. The artist must embrace and mediate between the realm of the self and external challenges. Mr. Thompson cannot bridge this gap because he does not feel its presence; he forms his identity based on appearances and outside pressures. He has not achieved an "honest life," has not recognized this realm of the self in which Sophia Jane most profoundly lives, and so is not capable of embracing and making sense of his psychological need for order and the world's tendency to destroy that order. "Noon Wine" explores the hero's lapse into self-hatred, as the murder and that which follows it reveals his reluctance to claim guilt and destructive potential as his own.

As Mr. Thompson's innocence is characterized by self-ignorance, consumption and indulgence, he passes into experience through the process of a conversation which challenges his identity and the validity of his provider. The Hatch dialogue, which culminates in murder, confuses Mr. Thompson's superficial sense of who he is, and inspires out of self-doubt a

hatred and the first definite action our hero takes. The determining factor in the sequence is Mr. Thompson's ignorance. He does not know the "news" about his trusty Swede, and he does not know, until the very end, what his disturbing visitor wants or where he comes from. Yet Mr. Thompson seems to know Hatch from somewhere, though he can't place just where. The familiarity is significant; just as Hatch shakes hands with himself, "as if he hadn't met himself for a long time," he introduces Mr. Thompson to a new and startling aspect of his life which he is in the habit of denying: self-doubt.³ From the beginning, Mr. Thompson is very concerned about how he appears towards his guest. He is unsettled with the stranger's free use of his full name, and he lies to hide his uneasiness: "...I never take any man for a suspicious character 'til he shows hisself to be one." (CS, 243) Mr. Thompson wants to know why Hatch guessed his family came from Ireland, and he feels inhibited from laughing as heartily as usual because Hatch seems "to be laughing for reason of his own." Hatch's reason is his knowledge about Helton, and as he come closer to revealing this and closer to revealing his intentions, Mr. Thompson becomes more anxious about his appearance. His is an insecurity bound up in that which he lacks---mainly, the self-possession necessary to run his farm, and his defense of his hired hand nearly leads him to admit this: "...and if he's crazy," said Mr. Thompson, "why, I think I'll go crazy myself for a change." (CS, 247) Hatch, as he reinterprets his words, articulates what Mr. Thompson could never do: get rid of his wife and act fiscally responsible. For Mr. Thompson by nature tends to spend and waste resources rather than saving them, and Mrs. Thompson is his convenient excuse and justification for failure. Hatch, then, challenges the appearances and crutches which have supported Mr. Thompson in the past and threatens, in the name of the law, the only source of order on the Thompson homestead.

The confrontation between Hatch and Helton signifies a conflict between an awareness of Mr. Thompson's deficiencies, embodied by Hatch, and the force of order embodied by Helton. "Noon Wine" speaks to Porter's understanding of the artistic impulse in that the hired hand, the only creative

³ Unrue casts Hatch as the embodiment of Mr. Thompson's evil nature: "Hatch in fact represents to Thompson his worst self." (*Truth and Vision*, 44) The conversation between the two characters suggests to me, however, a growing awareness on Mr. Thompson's part of his lack of self-possession and validity as a person, and not an inherent wickedness

being in the story, cannot co-exist on the same plot of land with self-doubt. The murder is initiatory for Mr. Thompson in that it signifies an instinctive knowledge of the threat which his insecurities pose toward the well-being of his farm. In considering pushing Hatch off the stool he imagines the sin, without consciously choosing to commit it. The initiations of Porter's stories often operate on the instinctive level. Like Maria Concepcion's decision to kill her rival, Mr. Thompson's act is a tacit, deeply psychological movement. In protecting Helton as he does, Mr. Thompson demonstrates a self-hatred inspired by the dialogue which reveals his weaknesses.

Mr. Thompson's crisis is not that he murdered Hatch, but that afterwards he fails to understand what has happened to him. He denies his guilt and tries to return to a state of innocence. His efforts are doomed to fail not because he has committed a great moral wrong, but because he has undergone the experience of admitting self-hatred. This is his new knowledge and with it comes the power to destroy, first Hatch and then himself. The murder takes on a sort of apocalyptic quality in the story's conclusion. The new life is marked first by Helton's absence and the memory of his destruction. In Mrs. Thompson's mind he is remembered as "so saving, so managing, and so good." (CS, 259) Helton is sacrificed, however, not to the bloodlust of the mob, but to her husband's sin: "Mr. Thompson can't argue with a man and get him off the place peaceably...he has to kill somebody, he has to be a murderer and ruin his boys' lives and cause Mr. Helton to be killed like a mad dog." (CS, 259) Helton's death signifies the manner in which Mr. Thompson forms his identity based on his appearance in society; the story's creative energy, manifested by Helton, is destroyed by communal pressure because Mr. Thompson himself is pulled and twisted by it. The murder has initiated the hero into a new state of existence. He looks like a dead man, and he thinks, "He was dead to his other life, he had got to the end of something without knowing why, and he had to make a fresh start, he did not know how." (CS, 264) The repeated story he tells his lawyer and neighbors is a false gospel which, even while it denies the dawning of Mr. Thompson's new knowledge of himself, reveals the truth of his self hatred. The fact is, he doesn't really know what the neighbors think but only sees his own hate in their faces. On the last visit he imagines their thoughts turning on him: "Mr. Thompson was ashamed of himself, he was suddenly in a rage, he'd like to knock their dirty skunk heads together, the low-down

white trash." (CS, 264) His doubt is entirely his own. He cannot convince himself of his innocence, not because he is a morally corrupt man, but because he knows something about his inner life, and that knowledge squirms "like an angleworm on a fishhook" in the blocked-out memory of a murder. It returns to him at night, this knowledge, even as he tries to think reasonably about what he could have said to Mr. Hatch "man to man." The murderous instinct rises in him again, starting him and Ellie, and he asks her to "light the lamp" to scare off the darkness. The boys, the true innocents, reclaim their mother from her unlucky collusion with guilty experience. Now the tables are turned; before the murder Mr. Thompson could turn the "awful face of fatherhood" on his boys, but now he is the accused. His acceptance of guilt is internal whereas his suicide note outwardly professes a false innocence. He banishes himself from his fields, his family and his life in the unconscious knowledge of a powerful hatred that turns in on a fearful self.

For Porter, Mr. Thompson's crisis is just what the artist must avoid. In "'Noon Wine': The Sources" she explains how the story was born out of initiatory moments in which she at once became educated about the world around her and became aware of changes in her own person. Her hero undergoes such an experience but denies its import in the context of his fractured identity. The passage into experience is not, ultimately, about guilt but about recognizing both the creative and destructive nature within the self and without. Mr. Thompson makes claim to neither, losing Helton to the masses and blaming the "yellow-livered" Hatch for his problems, while Sophia Jane practices her art in the face of time, the dispersal of her family, and death. Porter speaks to her mission as an artist by exploring in various ways this challenge of knowing the self in the context of initiation. In "The Grave," "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," self-understanding manifests itself in the unconscious capacity to order and define experience for what it is. The heroines of these stories possess the streak of the artist in that they strive to imaginatively bridge the distance between their inner lives and the outside. In stories such as "Flowering Judas" and "Old Mortality," on the other hand, the knowledge of experience creates a crisis of self-understanding in the context of harsh, dangerous environments. I will discuss these two stories now as variations on the theme introduced above of fractured identity and the destructive initiation.

"Flowering Judas" and "Old Mortality" do not address the issue of Porter's creative purpose quite so directly as the two works discussed above. They are relevant to this study because they speak to her understanding of the close relationship between initiation and self knowledge. The heroines of these stories resist the initiatory pressures of their communities, attempting to isolate themselves, to find edification in the rejection of the communal definitions that appear warped, or at times "beautiful and inaccurate." The heroines do not "fail" or display damnable weakness; rather, the stories reveal the unfortunate schisms between the private and public definitions of women, revolution and death. In the essay "'Noon Wine': The Sources," Porter, in discussing her inspiration for the story, asks, "Is it not almost the sole end of civilized education of all sorts to teach us to be more and more highly, sensitively conscious of the reality of the existence, the essential being, of others, those around us so very like us and yet so bafflingly, so mysteriously different?" (CE, 481) It is this sort of education, this sort of extension of the imagination into the unknown world which swirls around Laura, Amy and Miranda, that the heroines resist, or *must* resist in the context of threatening environments. The concept of apocalypse traditionally involves a clear opposition between forces of good and those of evil; each individual must choose the right side before the judgment time comes or be damned for eternity. In these two stories this dynamic is at play in the communal explanations of events, but it fails to explain the heroines' private experience. In "Old Mortality" Porter constructs a romance with no adequate hero, and Laura's world is haunted by the floating, irrelevant principle of a morally mandated, apocalyptic revolution played out by the self-indulgent and greedy.

In "Flowing Judas," Braggioni bears testimony to the communal apocalyptic atmosphere. Though a leader of a secular movement, he is endowed with Christ imagery and language. He is called a "world savior" and speaks on the revolution in Mexico much as Jesus speaks in the gospels of Jerusalem and the apocalypse: "Everything must be torn from its accustomed place where it has rotted for centuries, hurled skyward and distributed, cast down again clean as rain, without separate identity." (CS, 100) His apocalyptic qualities are derivative of communal principles and are upheld by the various voices and faces that Laura encounters. The hungry followers who put their faith in Braggioni buoys the sense of mission, as does

the revolution's dualistic tension. The image of the Socialists marching against the Catholics evokes the idea of dialectic conflict.⁴ This war is internalized by Laura. She has come to Mexico to publicly give herself to a cause, but she will privately betray it in the harmless form of hand-made lace and self-conscious visits to churches. The nature of this inner conflict is not specified, however. We know very little about Laura. What was she looking for in this revolution and what are those values of her upbringing in which she is "encased"? The answers are not given.

Her disillusionment, however, is a fact. Braggioni's "gluttonous bulk" is a fact and is described in great detail. He is a false savior, one of many who reap the riches of leadership, and "will never die of it," as a proper sacrificial lamb would. The story does not articulate the abstractions which inspired Laura to come to Mexico for they are proven irrelevant in the context of greed, indulgence and the demands the corruption make on her. Every point of encounter she has with the revolution is characterized by, not an attack on her sense of what a proper revolution is all about or on the values of her upbringing, but by an assault on her stance as a passive participant, on her innocence. The serenading boy and the young captain want her affection, the Polish agitator asks her to spread lies, the prisoners want freedom and solace, Braggioni wants her virginity, and Eugenio forces his death upon her. The pistol Braggioni has Laura clean for him is a weapon of principle, of a revolution, but in truth it is a deadly thing ("...go kill someone in Morelia, and you will be happier," she says.) and symbolic of the sexual threat he poses to her. Just as Braggioni's revolutionary integrity is undercut by the undeniable deadliness of the pistol and maliciousness of his sexual desire (A girl once laughed at his love and "A thousand women have paid for that." [CS, 99]), the principled conflict between Socialism and Catholicism is proven to be a front for a more profound and troubling crisis for Laura. The fact of her innocence, "the puzzle of her notorious virginity" (CS, 978) is besieged by the threats of experience. Laura resists the initiations her revolution would draw her into in a spirit of self-preservation. The revolution is male and phallic and its sexual propositions demand that Laura become an accomplice

⁴ Thomas Walsh offers an interesting historical gloss on the story. The revolutionists Porter was in the habit of associating with while in Mexico, he explains, consciously tried to subvert the Catholic promise of redemption in the later life by pledging salvation from economic oppression in this life. ("The Making of 'Flowing Judas,'" *Journal of Modern Literature*, March 1985, 123-124)

in desire tainted by insincerity, greed and death.⁵

The revolutionary dialectic is a false one. It, as does she, confuses "love with revolution, night with day, life with death." (CS, 101) It is of no use to Laura because it does not allow her to learn from the agents of experience who in reality betray that dialectic. Her inertia results from the conflict between her public role in a revolution and her tacit suspicion, which inspires a fear of imminent disaster, that something is happening to her. The opposition between innocence and experience is the only true dichotomy Porter presents, and her character in this instance must resist it because it is one known not in the static vocabulary of values or principles, but in the movement of narrative, in the change the self must undergo in the context of an unsympathetic environment. As she fears, Laura does drift towards an apocalypse, but one which turns inwards on her. The communal myth of the revolution, because of her efforts to resist and deny the real ugliness around her, turns its most ironic and cruel face to her threatened self. Laura "is waiting for tomorrow with a bitter anxiety as if tomorrow may not come, but time may be caught immovably in this hour, with herself transfixed, Braggioni singing on forever, and Eugenio's body not yet discovered by the guards." (CS, 99) The passage reveals that the true apocalyptic figure for Laura is not Braggioni, but Eugenio. In the New Testament women come to the tomb to discover a resurrection. Laura awaits the discovery of a death---by the guards but also by herself, as her subconscious realizes, in the final pages of the story, her responsibility in Eugenio's destruction. He, like Helton, is a sacrifice to the protagonist's sins. It is significant that she is referred to, in the context of her teaching, as a jailer, for Laura's relationship with this death is two-fold; she colludes in the deed and discovers it not as an event in the world, as the real guards will, but as a movement in her own self. At the end of the story she cannot sleep in the face of a new knowledge, in the wake of a personal apocalypse that at once undermines the integrity of the revolution (Eugenio is a more true reflection of Braggioni, the "world savior" who is so

⁵ Anne Goodwyn Jones argues that Porter presented war throughout her canon as a male phenomenon which enforced and exaggerated gender codes to a danger point. ("Gender and the Great War," *Women's Studies*: no. 1 and 2, 1986, 135-146) Similarly, Darlene Unrue finds Laura to be compromising her femininity in the context of the revolution. She discusses the flower imagery in the story as symbolic of the "female principle", which the heroine betrays in throwing the Judas flower to the serenading boy to make him go away instead of to encourage him. (*Truth and Vision*, 55-57) It is important to note that Laura is "betrayed", as well, by the corruption of her environment and acts as she does to protect herself from danger.

reluctant to save.) and forces Laura into a fear of herself. Her initiation is one of destruction and not creation because her environment is such that she cannot come to know it honestly. She will not discern the features of those hiding revolutionaries with the mask-like faces, or become familiar with those who pursue her. Her story is not about the failure to connect with others in meaningful ways, for there is no promise of meaning in Braggioni's hungry stare. Rather, it is about her need to imaginatively mediate the boundaries of herself (and her personal dialectic of ignorance and knowledge) and the revolution (and its false dialectic of apocalyptic triumph). In the absence of such mediation, her subconscious will drag her into an apocalypse which "will come like a thief," to quote scripture, in that it surprises and steals away illusions of innocence. As in "Noon Wine," knowledge of initiation is involuntary. Laura's imagination, her creative impulse, explains events through her dream. But instead of extending into the world around her, Laura's mythical communion with Eugenio's death poisons herself.

The heroine of "Old Mortality" also demonstrates this need to know, this necessary movement toward experience that Laura faces. It is a very different sort of story from "Flowering Judas," in that its protagonist is in the seemingly familiar and friendly environment of her family. Yet this context, like the revolution, offers a dualistic explanation of reality which does not satisfy Miranda's need for knowledge and experience which will relate her own femininity to constructed identities of women. The truth of Amy's life is buried, tyrannically, by family legend, and Miranda at the conclusion burns to write her own story.

Like Braggioni, Gabriel is a failed hero imbued with apocalyptic expectations. Though Porter herself denied that the choice of the name Gabriel was an intentional biblical allusion, the image of the archangel is helpful in describing Gabriel's role in "Old Mortality." The biblical namesake is the messenger who explains to the Virgin Mary her destiny. In Porter's story, Gabriel is presented as the perfect suitor for Amy: he has wealth, good looks and youth, and Amy's relatives are pressuring her to accept him. In short, Gabriel is Amy's messenger; he is the agent of a communal, patriarchal system and is destined to inform her of her role as a woman. He acts in the context of a community which, so different from the practical Parrington's, is captivated with stories of love and faded beauty. The Rhea family lifts up Aunt Amy, in life and posthumously, as the example of prototypical female

grace. When she slips out of line in even the slightest way, the legend marks her down as dancing with the devil and a far off aunt warns her of eternal damnation awaiting her at her personal apocalypse. On the other hand, the family alienates Cousin Eva, the old maid by birth, damned with deformity. The dialectic thinking which opposes beauty and ugliness, good and evil⁶, and which shapes the communal definition of feminine identity, is internalized by the following generation, as well, just as Laura absorbs the revolutionary dialectic in "Flowering Judas." Miranda and Maria are taught to see in two ways: there is the "world of poetry," haunted by the persona of Aunt Amy, and then there is Eva, who "belonged to their everyday world of dull lessons to be learned, stiff shoes to limbered up, scratchy flannels to be endured in cold weather, measles and disappointed expectations." (CS, 178)

The dialectic romance satirizes itself in legend, however, and fails to explain the reality Miranda discovers in the second part of the story. The costume ball fiasco becomes a failed attempt at a classic good/evil conflict, a duel between men over a woman. Laced through this part of the Amy myth is an assumption of lady-like propriety. From the start Amy is not willing to play by the approved rules. She must corrupt an innocent shepherdess outfit with a low bodice and bare ankles, and at the ball she must slip away from Gabriel with a former love interest. Harry and Mariana, sensibly wearing the "conventional disguise of romance," are comfortably in bounds, on the other hand. The contrivance of the romance is quickly revealed, however, when Gabriel discovers Amy's "sin": "Into this bliss broke Gabriel. He had thrown away his shepherd's crook and he was carrying his wig." (CS, 186) The nature of any moral infraction is entirely uncertain, though Harry's brashness and the talk of a duel suggest a great wrong. This confrontation between good and evil, attempted in the name of chivalry and a young lady's honor, then, is a comic failure.

Amy is aware of this failure, aware of her hero's dullness and incompetence. At the same time she is conscious of her role in the romance: "If I am to be the heroine of this novel," she says, "why shouldn't I make the most of it?" (CS, 189) The question is a sad one. Novels, however

⁶ Northrop Frye defines the romantic "mythos" as being characterized by apocalyptic dichotomies such as hero and villain, young and old, beautiful and ugly, bright and dark. (*The Anatomy of Criticism*, 186-188) It is helpful to hold up his description of romance against what happens in "Old Mortality;" the discrepancies are undeniable.

beautiful and romantic they may be, are limited; they must always end and their heroines' fate are predetermined by the written word. Amy's destiny, to marry, is particularly strict and certain, as the costume ball anecdote illustrates. She simultaneously accepts this end in a spirit of fatalism and makes "the most of it" in her daring acts of freedom. She races off on horses, cuts her hair, and wears scandalous costumes. The foremost example of her passive resistance (passive because she does, after all, play the romance better than anyone, as her legend will testify) is her reluctance to marry Gabriel.

But she does eventually accept her suitor from her sickbed. What actually happens to her is an unknown. The paramount collective truth regarding her life is that she was beautiful, prototypically so, and when Cousin Eva challenges the legend Miranda turns instinctively to that truth: "'She was very beautiful,' she said, as if this explained everything. 'Everybody said she was very beautiful.'" (CS, 214) But that is only the resurrected Amy, the being who does not remember the less-attractive photograph or the explanation behind her choice of husband, or the reason for her death. Indeed, what we do know about Amy (that's really nothing, for sure, but that she lived and died) is not as interesting as what we are led to suspect: that she feared her communally destined initiation and could not live, or did not want to live afterwards. Her marriage to Gabriel (six weeks long---the span of lent) is a preparation for death. It is not coincidence that the illness which has previously punished her for acts of rebellion finally consumes her (or is said to have consumed her) in marriage. The tuberculosis, as Jane Krause DeMouy observes, is about the limitations of her life and the weight that bears on her desire for freedom.⁷ Her illness is a sort of punishment for her hesitancy regarding marriage ("Greensickness," her mother calls it.) and sex and childbirth are the communal remedies. (*Katherine Anne Porter's Women*, 152-153) Amy's initiation, like that of Laura's in "Flowering Judas" and Mr. Thompson's in "Noon Wine," is involuntary. She is presented as prophetic ("I am not long for this world!")

⁷ DeMouy argues that "Old Mortality" is as much Amy's story as it is Miranda's. She characterizes Amy's illness as the manifestation of her femininity in the manner in which it is associated with marriage and oppression. (*Katherine Anne Porter's Women*, 145-155) I find myself in disagreement with her argument only when she treats Amy as a character of psychological complexity. (She offers several explanations, for example, for Amy's decision to marry Gabriel.) The Amy we read about is only a presentation, a character as narrated by a family and her motivations are necessarily left mysterious. The thumbprints of legend ("If I am to be the heroine of this novel...") are conspicuous on Porter's portrayal.

and the manner in which she agrees to wed, saying after her hemorrhage that they must hurry in time for Mardi Gras, suggests an awareness of her fate. This drift toward an inevitable end allows no opportunity for the personal autonomy necessary to extend the self beyond the "beautiful and inaccurate" boundaries of the communal (male) imagination.

But the explanation for why and how Amy died is not as revealing as the uncertainty Porter creates around our reading of her character. For Amy's death is only a death in the narrative of a legend which raises her up again. The family remains forever in innocence regarding Amy's life; in essence, Part One is a study in communal memory. The storytelling owes little to such factual evidence as the photo on the wall or the fat women in the family who prove the father, who says there was no obesity in the family, dead wrong. Maria and Miranda ask to hear bits of the story again and again, and each time their appetites for narrative are satisfied with embellished accounts: "'Tell me again how Aunt Amy went away when she was married.' 'She ran into the gray cold and stepped into the carriage and turned and smiled with her face as pale as death and called out Good-by, good-by...'" (CS, 176) True or false, such storytelling creates the family environment; it is as real as a house, as a farm, or an orchard. It shapes its audience, as the audience shapes it. Miranda grows up thinking she, too, will grow up to be beautiful in the prototypical style of her dead aunt. Porter's interest in such myth derived from her fascination with the malleability of communal order---how it is shaped, reinforced and revised by the imagination. In the context of the overall structure of "Old Mortality" Amy's death communicates meaning only as it is understood by the familial audience.

History is recreated to serve specific ends in the story. In Part One the family is seen perpetuating myth in the name of family pride and for the purpose of educating its girls about what it means to be a desirable young lady. In Part Three Eva co-opts the myth with the purpose of explaining her role as feminist and her bitter alienation. Both tracks lead to vast overstatements of truth; either Aunt Amy was the most beautiful creature to grace the earth or the family is the root of all human wrongs. Miranda's challenge, and the challenge of the artist, is to discern her own, unique way of relating herself to the evolving stories which form the imaginative landscape in which she matures. In a letter to her nephew, Porter wrote that all writers somehow land in a tradition, even if they never meant to. She writes, "the best kind of

originality is that which works within limitations of form, creating variations, and progressing, adding something new; it is a kind of organic growth and change." (*Letters*, 211) The "limitations of form" she writes of in her letter are realities for her heroine in "Old Mortality." Porter viewed the self as being in constant contact with the outside world, constantly defining itself in the way it imagines those necessary limitations. In Part Two Miranda looks through the thick lens of her childhood education and finds herself revising what she thought she knew.

Gabriel, discovered by surprise at a race track in New Orleans (the city of Amy's death), is extensively caricatured; his eyelids are puffy, his cheeks droop, his fat rolls. Miss Lucy's victory becomes a moral shock for the heroine as she watches the horse bleed: "Miranda stood staring. This was winning, too. Her heart clinched tight, that was winning, for Miss Lucy." (CS 199) Miranda learns that Gabriel, the hero of the romance which has always spoken to her idea of womanhood, lives a life that creates real losers: the horse (associated with the memory of the sick and dying Amy) and the wife, bitter and alone in a dingy hotel room. Miranda's decision to not become a jockey signifies an acknowledgment that the world of romance and adventure, of poetry and legend is in fact filled with danger and ironic victories, from which she, her father reminds her, is not even allowed to benefit; the money from the race is locked away and she is told that being a jockey is no more "womanly" than being a lion tamer. She is returned to the convent to be "immured" once again.

Without attacking the facts of the family legend, Porter does something much more substantive: she exposes the failure of the dialectic vision. The expectations of reality (a world defined in the romantic terms of good and evil) which family education instills in Miranda are in no way met. In Part One Miranda confuses reality with "poetry," and in Part Two she knows, we are told, that poetry is "true but not real." She is more aware of the difference between what is and what is not and her moral discovery at the racetrack and in Gabriel's hotel room is born out of this understanding. This dynamic points to a fundamental of Porter's vision: morality exists and changes independently of the communal imagination. It is formed on the subjective level as the individual sifts through claims to collective truths, stumbles into gaps between those truths and private experience of the real world. When myth fails to explain the present, when the father, the myth-maker cannot

tell Miranda if and why Uncle Gabriel is a drunk, then the communal good faith may falter. The events of Part Two reveal the beginning of a subjective revision of an old story. Upon seeing Uncle Gabriel, "a vast bulging man," at the racetrack, Maria and Miranda think, "Oh, what did grown-up people mean when they talked, anyway?"

In the final part of the story Miranda has furthered this revision of family myth in the form of herself. She has broken away from expectations and propriety to redefine herself without regard to the model of her mythologized relatives. And yet it cannot be said that Miranda has escaped from the innocence of the past, the innocence which does not know the truth about Aunt Amy. She has a wavering faith in the legend's validity and discovers herself defending its romantic integrity from Cousin Eva's attacks. Nevertheless, Eva is successful in awakening Miranda to the distance between romance and fact by exaggerating this discrepancy. Miranda is presented in the end with two role models, Amy and Eva; they become options as she examines her adult female identity. But even Eva, especially Eva, cannot bridge the gap between fact and fiction for Miranda. For the cousin's story is born out of anger and cannot belong to anyone but her, and her virtue ("Beauty goes, character stays") comes to Miranda in "the small voice of axiomatic morality." We leave Miranda in "her ignorance" because there is no alternative vision for her. She, like her aunt and cousin, desires freedom. But the autonomy she demands is more ambitious; it does not subscribe to an obvious political agenda or operate feverishly within the confines of the old order. Rather, Miranda hopes for a way to explain in her very own terms the difference between the "world of poetry" and the reality of the present, between innocence and experience.

She lives in both realms; she believes in Amy's beauty, but she has eloped and created her own life. She had been instructed to identify "good and evil ends...But what was good, and what was evil?" she asks. The myth of innocence speaks in the terms of this dichotomy, but it does not accurately explain reality because it does not explain her. Though no longer a virgin, Miranda does await a more significant initiation. Though her father has not yet forgiven her sins of experience, the marriage has not settled the questions of feminine identity in Miranda's mind. She tells Eva about the elopement and "It seemed very unreal even as she said it, and seemed to have nothing at all to do with the future...the only feeling she could rouse in herself about it

was an immense weariness as if it were an illness that she might one day hope to recover from." (CS, 212-13) Again, a young woman's attempt to rebel against the family brings on a punishing state of "weariness."

For Amy, as well as Miranda, there is no mythic vision of honest feminine experience to inform her. In Amy's case marriage is a death trap that remains unexplained for those who follow. Eva tells Miranda that knowledge won't hurt a woman, but the self-knowledge Miranda seeks was not encouraged by her education. Her father, if ever she and Maria would make bold statements as children, would ask the girls cruelly, "How do you *know*?" (CS, 184) The question echoes through the last pages of this story. Miranda does not know how she knows, for the communal knowledge she was brought up with is absolute, suddenly, and it did not give her the tools to seize an autonomous self-knowledge; there is no new memory of what happened to Amy, after all, to replace the old memory. We leave the Miranda of "Old Mortality" as she angrily rejects the past and all its claims on her, but her position in the world will be determined by this break; her outrage with the "ties of love," as she runs from her marriage, will always be tied to her past. At the center of this story is the blind, fatal initiatory experience of Amy's marriage and death. Miranda cannot grasp it, cannot claim her imaginative memory, which has brought Amy to life, as her own. The truth of what happens to her in the context of her fury will live in the mystery of what happened to her aunt, in the facelessness of the unexplained female self which dies and rises again in memory.

"Flowering Judas" and "Old Mortality" make for an unlikely comparison. One, written early in Porter's career, is based on travel experience in Mexico, while the other, a product of a more mature artist, was born of an examination of family memory. For all their differences, however, the two stories reveal in similar ways how Porter understood the development of self knowledge in the context of communal imagination. Both Laura and Miranda live in environments defined by a dialectic expressed in mythical language of apocalypse and romance. What they both need but cannot achieve is a way to relate their identities to their surroundings by re-imagining the mythical constructs in which they live. Their need is to embrace their worlds in creative ways, and yet both characters reject the imaginative landscapes around them. Laura does so out of fear of real physical danger represented in Braggioni and his pistol. Miranda does so

because family memory does not serve her yearning for independence. The need for self-initiation, then, the natural need to further knowledge in the same "organic growth and change" Porter writes of in her letter, is not met. Laura fears sleep and Miranda rejects memory. Only in sleep, however, is the knowledge of Laura's experience, and only in Miranda's memory rests the truth of what will happen to her.

So far Mr. Thompson, Laura and Miranda have demonstrated the inevitable drift in life from innocence to experience, the reality of loss, and the natural and dangerous fragmentation of order and meaning in hollow shell of communal myth. "The truth of art is got by change," and these stories are studies in isolated and threatened identities hesitating to seize upon the initiations which will happen despite all denial, and which, in the absence of self understanding, will have destructive rather than creative ramifications. The artist of "The Journey," we have seen, lives the "honest life in a tragic, creative inspiration that works under the shadow of impending disorder and mortality. The intricacies of this "honest life" are worked out in breathtaking simplicity in such stories as "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," "The Grave" and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." I turn to these stories now because they further the understanding of Porter's artistic purpose. Laura operates on the periphery of a corrupt revolution, fearing the discover of a corpse that very much belongs to her, Miranda rejects the memory of a past which still holds mysteries about her maturity, and Mr. Thompson denies guilt. The heroines of the following three stories possess a more tragic aura in their open confrontation with Porter's principle mystery: the simultaneity of creation and destruction, life and death. While she reveals in "Old Mortality" and "Flowering Judas," as well as in other stories ("Virgin Violeta," "Maria Concepcion") dangerous dualistic thought patterns, Porter created art with an eye that found truth in our movement between opposites like good and evil, order and chaos, life and death. She worked out of a faith in the power of the mind to remember loss, and thus to understand and derive ordered meaning from it. Such faith is achieved through initiations and manifested in narrative. It is at once unshakable, as the heroine of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" learns, and tenderly hopeless, as Ellen Weatherall discovers, in the face of our complete innocence of death, the final and unfathomable initiation.

It takes a very honest sort of imagination to attempt a story which

brings its heroine to the brink of death and then raises her up again. Porter, who nearly died of influenza in Denver during the epidemic of 1918, was cognizant of the ambition of her story. She wrote to Lodwick Hartley, a critic of hers, that "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" "is so completely autobiographical it amounts almost to a document, and if it fails, it is because I attempted, literally, the impossible---at least, I am afraid, for me. I attempted, among other things, to give an account of what is called the Beatific vision, the strange rapture that occurs...just before death. Not many survive to tell, and it is very difficult to tell even imperfectly." (*Letters*, 177) Porter responded to the challenge with a simplicity and intentness which characterizes her mature fiction and which reflects the crisis Miranda faces. It is a story about seeing through false presentations and confronting loss in the spirit of a "hard unwinking angry point of light." (CS, 311) Miranda, who keeps "learning all the wrong things" (CS, 289), recognizes the war-effort as a contrivance, just as she realizes that "soft carefully shaped words like oblivion and eternity are curtains hung before nothing at all." (CS, 310) The faith which Miranda comes to grasp is born of an honest confrontation with initiation.

Like many of Porter's stories, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is concerned with how a public phenomenon is internalized by an individual. In public life the war-effort is a show which casts participants in new costumes. It is about being peripherally involved and not appreciating the truth of war. People get worked up over buying Liberty Bonds (as if the purchase would free one from the responsibility of war), the women bring food for wounded soldiers (but only talk with the friendly ones), and one volunteer will dance with soldiers (but won't talk to them). Even Adam, who awaits his entrance into the thick of battle, knows nothing but what the military has told him and yet feels he's "been there and back." (CS, 282) He gets terribly excited over hearing about the war and stabbing sandbags with bayonets. The war-effort that Porter portrays very much skirts the underlying threat posed to individuals. It is one which calls for innocent support, support which does not know or admit the fact of loss. The war, as it claims the lives of young men, reveals a certain loss of innocence, and yet the public nature of the war allows for a communal avoidance of this danger. Miranda was demoted at the newspaper because she would not make public the shame of a young woman who tried to elope. Just as she will not support the disclosure of this

story, she will not support a war-effort which knows, and yet does not know, what is at stake---the innocence of those involved. (The girl tried to elope but did not marry. She is publicly shamed despite her innocence, just as young men like Adam make fine public offerings.) Miranda sees through the costuming, and this awareness is manifested in her illness. Her first dream, in which death wears a familiar face, is brought to a conclusion with the word "War" resonating through her consciousness.

The war pervades her dream-life because it has created the inevitability of loss which frames the story. Early on Adam is presented as untried: "He had boasted that he had never had a pain in his life that he could remember." And Miranda is said to be living in "an illusion of maturity and experience." (CS, 280) But now the war approaches and living must be accelerated. They smoke cigarettes because healthy lungs, they joke, won't help them in the war, and keep odd hours to spend as much time together as possible. Adam and Miranda, both drifting toward a personal apocalypse, are highly aware of war-time. He self-consciously checks his new wrist-watch and remarks that sapping parties have an average life-span of nine minutes. She feels the pressure of time creating distance between herself and Adam, between herself and the state of innocence in which she has lived. She knows she stands to lose as Adam's departure approaches and her illness grows; she becomes aware as she relinquishes her duties as drama critic over to Charles (who does not care about the war because he's not going to be there) that "This is the beginning of the end of something." (CS, 290)

Ultimately, what Miranda will come to know are the boundaries of life. Before the influenza takes her under she lives in fear of these boundaries. She loves in Adam a radiance and purity (He looks like a "fine healthy apple."), but also sees in him a look of death. His eyes are black as he waves good-bye to her, and when she peers in at him waiting for her in a restaurant his usually bright countenance is "set in a blind melancholy, a look of pained suspense and disillusion." (CS, 295) He is said to be "beyond experience" because he is fated to die by forces far greater than either one of them can control. There is a hopelessness to their situation, an oppressive apocalyptic doom that sends them rushing from restaurant to dance hall as time runs out. When the couple drives to the mountains one afternoon and watches from a stone ledge a paradisiacal sunset over a valley, Miranda calls the scenery "apocryphal": "'We need not believe it, but it is fine poetry.'" (CS, 285)

She will not have faith in it because it is a permanent sort of beauty that exists in the peaceful continuity of repeated sunsets, while her life (and Adam's) is so fraught with change and danger. In the same paragraph, however, the couple is impressed by the ancient and solid rocks displayed in a geological museum. The image of the old miners searching for gold in streams while the treasure rests in buried boulders beneath speaks to Miranda's waking fears and instability, the couple's frantic hope for fulfillment in the fast stream of time. In her death-dream, however, Miranda discovers herself and she is a rock.

What happens in the dream explains the faith with which Miranda escapes. The images, born out of a fear of loss, culminate in the essential rejection of death. The first image, which rises in her before she is taken to the hospital, has Adam in a woods, assaulted by arrows and caught in a "perpetual death and resurrection." Miranda intervenes to be shot through the heart; she survives and Adam's body perishes, foreshadowing the truth that his death and the loss of innocence will only be known to her through an assault on her own being. Once moved to the hospital and physically separated from Adam, her dreams take her through a horrifying gauntlet of images before leaving her in total isolation. The fear of death (her own and Adam's) is represented by her imagination as a fear of lost innocence. She imagines an old man in a wheelchair, a patient, who "in a high weeping voice" is trying "to explain to them that the crime of which he was accused did not merit the punishment he was about to receive." (CS, 308) Her doctor becomes a vicious German soldier who taints the well of her childhood home with poison and bayonets an infant. These two images are the work of the apocalyptic imagination which pervades so much of Porter's fiction. When Miranda momentarily awakes, calling for someone to kill the doctor, she is essentially choosing sides as the apocalypse approaches. Previously, she refused to join in the bloodthirsty cry for battle; she participates only when it is waged in herself. Adam echoes the popular opinion of the time saying that the war would end all wars, but in Miranda's imagination the war will only destroy her innocence, her ignorance of death.

But what will it create? Miranda's mind is said to be split between a "strange frenzy" of apocalyptic horror and the side which watches on in silence. This split speaks to Porter's belief in the static self which is capable of existing in the context of imminent crisis. In a 1963 interview with the *Paris*

Review Porter remarked that over all the years her outlook on the world had not changed much; she said, "We change, of course, every day...yet there is a basic and innate being that is unchanged." (Thompson, 112) Miranda's watchful self appears in this moment of crisis. For the second time in the story, she finds herself on a stone ledge but instead of apocryphal scenery or even the vision of apocalyptic destruction, there is the strange nothingness of death. The battle, as Miranda has suspected all along, is a challenge of personal will power only, a challenge she is prepared to meet: "This fiery motionless particle set itself unaided to resist destruction, to survive and to be in its own madness of being, motiveless and planless beyond that one essential end. Trust me, the hard unwinking angry point of light said. Trust me. I stay." (CS, 311)

What follows demonstrates Porter's understanding of how memory crystallizes experience into faith. Her new knowledge of death inspires in her a mythical vision of her passage from innocence to experience. She discovers a paradise filled with the faces of her past, an endless morning, only to be banished by the memory of the dead to "a strange stony place of bitter cold." (CS, 312) She cannot return from where she has come. Adam has died, but more importantly, she has discovered death in herself. (The dream of the woods prophesied this---the bodily death and the resurrection of the wounded heart as a single event.) The doctor and nurse, injecting her with a substance, remind her of the loss as they "glance at each other with the glance of initiates at a mystery, nodding in silence, their eyes alive with knowledgeable pride." (CS, 312) The armistice has the hospital singing "Sweet land of liberty" but Miranda rises as the one free survivor of the war because she has actually fought it and knows the limits of life in a way she did not before. The light of the world is dimmer than it once was and she smells death in her room, and yet she has learned the truth of her innocence. In the first part of the story, the valley she and Adam visit is "apocryphal," while in her dream the paradise is entirely real: "That was a child's dream of the heavenly meadow, the vision of repose that comes to a tired body in sleep, she thought, but I have seen it when I did not know it was a dream." (CS, 314) Miranda "wept silently, shamelessly, in pity for herself and her lost rapture." (CS, 314) The memory of her self-created paradise informs her knowledge of reality in the context of change, loss, the "road that would lead her again to death." (CS, 314) Though Miranda views the world with profound sobriety,

the discovery of Adam's death allows her to rise from her bed and continue living. The vantage point this loss offers her---the memory of innocence, of Adam---allows her to live honestly in the confines of her mortality. She is tempted to play the role of a Doubting Thomas, wanting only to see Adam before her again, attempting to raise him up through the same power of her will which brought her from the edge of death. But this will not do, and she knows it. Her journey to the abyss taught her the absolute isolation of herself, the tenuousness of human bonds.

The story's conclusion does not voice despair. Adam's death marks Miranda's resurrection, the end of the war, and a freedom from pestilence. In the context of what we know of Miranda, the last line of the story ("Now there would be time for everything." [CS, 317]) signifies a liberation from the temporal and moral confines of an apocalyptic wartime, the capacity to act with the knowledge of death and the memory of loss. In the context of what we know of Katherine Anne Porter, the last line of the story relates that liberation to her work as an artist. Before losing consciousness, Miranda speaks with Adam about what they had hoped to accomplish in their lives. Adam talks about being an engineer but Miranda offers no certain answer: "There's nothing much to tell, after all, if it ends now, for all this time I was getting ready for something that was going to happen later, when the time came." (CS, 302) The quote speaks directly to the way Porter thought of her own youth as she was preparing to be a writer. In the interview with the *Paris Review*, Porter said that during the years leading up to her time in Denver she was "living almost as instinctively as a little animal, but I realize now that all that time a part of me was getting ready to be an artist." (Thompson, 95) Later in the interview she said her experience with influenza "simply divided my life, cut across it like that. So that everything before that was just getting ready, and after that I was in some strange way altered, ready." (Thompson, 97) And Joan Givner writes that when she left Denver for New York after recovering from the disease and working as the *Rocky Mountain News* drama editor, Porter wrote to her sister to say that "she was going away now and that one day she would write as well as anyone in America." (*Katherine Anne Porter: A Life*, 140) This biographical background serves to endow the concluding statement of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" with the notion of artistic mission. For the change which Miranda undergoes does seem to correlate with Porter's own sense of initiation and

the crystallization of her purpose as a writer. The memory of loss makes the past more real than it was in innocence, for the imagination can then claim it, shape it, and make the artistic offering. If before the illness Miranda had no faith in the continuity and permanence of a mountain valley sunset, she (and Porter) would come to know in the loneliness of the unshakable self the beauty of a mythical initiation, the strength of the initiate. Says the heroine, "no one need pity this corpse if we look properly to the art of the thing." (CS, 316)

Porter was very conscious of the close relationship between her fiction and her experience and often testified in letters and essays to the manner in which her stories were shaped from the memory of actual events. She wrote to a friend in 1931 that "Life comes first, an art not rooted in human experience is not worth a damn." (*Letters* 34) She saw her art as a vocation to which she was born and, like her characters who drift involuntarily toward their personal apocalypses, their banishment from gardens of innocence, Porter created out of necessity. Or at least she saw art as a means to constantly order experience as it necessarily assaults the self. Her eye focuses on those turning points to which are simultaneously bound the memory of innocence and the knowledge of experience. No Porter story treats this phenomenon more prototypically than "The Grave." This Miranda's banishment is communicated with a poetic concentration unparalleled in Porter's canon.

In the story which precedes "The Grave," "The Fig Tree," Miranda is told that "'when tree frogs shed their skins, they pull them off over their heads like little shirts, and they eat them.'" (CS, 361) The image serves as an appropriate metaphor for the dynamic at work in that piece as well as the following. Miranda learns in these two stories that the old order, or the communal codes of behavior as established by the Grandmother, achieve meaning only as it is contradicted in experience or lost altogether. In other words, time devours constructions of meaning and they are replaced, naturally so, out of continuous human need. The Miranda of "Old Mortality" felt this need to revise an old story, and in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" the heroine's dream shapes a life-changing event around the mythical trope of banishment from innocence which informs her understanding of the waking world. In "The Old Order" in general, and "The Grave" in particular, Porter demonstrates how this process of revision, of cyclical destruction and creation is a continuous and organic cycle of the imagination.

Miranda's loss of innocence is defined on multiple levels. The Grandmother has died, leaving Harry with little money, and Miranda is somehow aware of the family's decline. She's dressed in overalls to save money and the family land has been broken up in pieces and sold. The childhood visit to the old graveyard, a wild garden, takes on the aura of a forbidden foray into the innocent past, a past which no longer belongs to the family. The central event of the story, then, is surrounded by this atmosphere of familial transition and decay, a status which effects Miranda directly; the local cronies tell her it's sinful to dress as she does. Their criticism speaks to the family's fall from grace but also emphasizes Miranda's childishness, her corrupt innocence. Similarly, the graveyard, with its gaping holes, communicates the Rhea's misfortune and loss, but makes for a fine, dirty adventure for the brother and sister. The story focuses on a time of change in which the balance between innocence and experience is exhilaratingly precarious. The nine-year-old, with her "powerful social sense," feels shame from the cronies' criticism, but the communal judgment does not teach her what she can only discover for herself. The familial continuity her graveyard ring suggests provokes an instinctive yearning for womanhood and all the costuming of maturity. But it is an innocent yearning, entirely ignorant of where it might take her. This innocence is tacitly dispelled in the discovery of the dead rabbit: "Having seen, she felt at once as if she had known all along. The very memory of her former ignorance faded, she had always known just this." (CS, 366) Miranda trembles at the sight because it provides a dreadful and beautiful context for her new sense of femininity, for there is suddenly great danger in birth and in being born.⁸ Life and death are known at once, in one place, one image and moment. Yet this education is considered a sin; she must not tell a soul because the initiation feels like an infraction of a family code. Similarly, when the moment is rediscovered in the story's coda, Miranda is seen in a foreign environment, separated from the familial past. Her maturity and the demise of the old order are inseparable events, just as the "weep, weep, weep" of the dying chick comes to signify the frogs of spring in "The Fig Tree." Miranda is in a strange place that possesses the same smell of corruption which led her to the graveyard initiation years before. Her banishment is complete, she is a woman of experience, and yet the childhood

⁸ DeMouy smartly ties this sense of danger to Miranda's emerging sexuality and the hunter-brother with his "masculine rifle." (*Katherine Anne Porter's Women*, 143)

initiation remains prototypically potent. She remembers in an act of the subconscious and "She was so reasonlessly horrified she halted suddenly staring." (CS, 367) But the memory proves to be pivotal. Just as it acts as a response to her strange surroundings, the image of the dead rabbit is the door into her memory of lost innocence, symbolized in her brother "turning the silver dove over and over in his hands." (CS, 368) It is the most mysterious moment in Porter's fiction because it, as does the image of the shot rabbit, unifies innocence and experience. The fierce sunlight of memory and the dove of providence illicit from the reader not the concept of nostalgia for a hopelessly lost past, but a wonderment in the manner in which the childhood initiation lives again, continuously, in defining Miranda's adult state of exile.

In Porter's fiction the fear of the innocent is not to be appeased in the context of this demanding world. It rises again as time renders order absolute, forcing the self to forge fresh art, draw more appropriate boundaries. Porter considered the creative enterprise to be a life-long necessity. She wrote to Kenneth Burke from Mexico in 1930 about her work: "I began something here years ago that very evidently must be finished, in the long, laborious unbreakable line of personal experience that begins God knows when and ends only when the last vestiges of your existence have been demolished. So I can't battle with my life, for here it is, and thus and so it was with me, and when I am finished with it, it will have been recognizably a life." (*Letters*, 24) The quotation speaks to one of Porter's most tragic figures, Ellen Weatherall, who reflects on her recognizable life before death. She grasps at meaning out of the past until the very end, when, on the brink of destruction, she chooses the only hope for truth---an initiatory act of the imaginative self.

Ellen is an old woman with much behind her---an accomplished artist of sorts. Like Sophia Jane, her children are completed works: "There they were, made out of her and they couldn't get away from that." (CS, 83) She can lay claim to "pantry shelves laid out with rows of jelly glasses," fence posts she erected, and "the bright field where everything was planted so carefully in orderly rows." And, like Sophia Jane, she knows full well that "It was good to be strong enough for everything, even if all you make melted and changed and slipped under your hands." (CS, 83) Now she is going to die, however, and that is an altogether different matter. Ellen Weatherall faces the most threatening sort of initiation, and the manner in which she approaches it is

beautiful and tragic, but not meant to be judged as entirely valiant or cowardly. The informing principle of this story is that no matter what a person has accomplished, created, experienced, she will pass out of life in a state of innocence of what awaits.

Even though the heroine sees herself getting out of bed and taking care of daily business, spanking Cornelia and scolding the doctor, Ellen's illness (or old age) is associated with youth and incompetence. Doctor Harry says to her, "Now, now, be a good girl, and we'll have you up in no time." (CS, 80) That's a lie; she is to be protected from the truth. (Her daughter "whispers around doors.") All the people around her---doctor, priest, children---are of no help. The initiation commences in her own mind. The first few pages of the story portray Ellen looking over her accomplishments, but then she asks herself, "What was it I set out to do?" (CS, 83) In other words, What is the conclusion to this story of hardship and achievement? What is its meaning? At this point a "fog rose over the valley, she saw it marching across the creek swallowing the trees and moving up the hill like an army of ghosts." In response to her question she clings to the image of her children who "huddled up to her and breathed like little calves" during the lighting of the lamps. But once lit, the children scatter and are lost; once the light of memory invades her darkness the knowledge of loss is inevitable. This image of the children running from the mother leads, naturally, to the memory of the jilting, a force of disorder, a cloud over her orderly field and well-managed, artistic life. The jilting is the painful answer to her question, "What is it I set out to do" for it speaks to a dashed hope. The story reveals very little about her relationship with the missing bridegroom, but there is the sense that in that marriage which did not happen was a self-fulfillment, an affirmation of faith. When the priest comes to prepare her for death, she is reminded of her "secret comfortable understanding with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for her." But the memory of her fainting after the jilting immediately undercuts this understanding. Near the conclusion she does find herself on a road through a paradisiacal mass sung by birds, but she is in a wagon with George. The lost bridegroom, and not her friendly saints, appears as her custodian of the faith and meaning her religion pretends to offer.

But Ellen Weatherall did not, as some readings suggest, ignore or repress this disgrace. Robert Brinkmeyer argues that Ellen Weatherall has

dangerously avoided her past. He writes that "on a deep emotional level she has never recovered from the jilting." (*Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development*, 136) While there is plenty of evidence to support this, his argument does not recognize that the heroine did a great deal after her jilting and that the sequence of her thoughts and dreams reveals a creative, if tragic, response to her initial disgrace.⁹ Hapsy represents this response. While George arises from her past as a custodian of meaning and fulfillment, the memory of her lost daughter arises as a testimony to her individualist, artistic life.¹⁰ Her name is introduced just after the jilting is explained, and is followed by a dialogue with Cornelia in which Ellen seems to be slipping farther and farther into her own distant world. Her failure to communicate signifies her search for meaning in herself, as she explores first the jilting and then the memory of Hapsy. "It was Hapsy she really wanted. She had to go a long way back through a great many rooms to find Hapsy standing with a baby on her arm." (CS, 85) It is significant that Ellen's memory of George comes involuntarily, while she consciously chooses to look for this child of hers. Her journey into memory is a tragic search for meaning which she has

⁹ Many critical readings of this story are split between those which applaud the heroine's bravery that allows her to blow out the light, and those which cast her as a failure for not honestly confronting the pain of her life. Brinkmeyer finds Ellen Weatherall to be "as much a failed artist as a failed person." He characterizes her as someone who avoids the real pain in her life by structuring a superficial narrative of herself which casts her as the heroic and strong matriarch. (*KAP's Artistic Development*, 135-139) He denies the character of her victories as much as Roseanne L. Hoefel denies the importance of the jilting. Her essay argues that Hapsy was not a child of Ellen Weatherall, but a friend and possibly a lover. She rightly points out the manner in which the heroine has indeed grown as a person since losing George. Hoefel is so intent, however, on casting Ellen as a strong and stable individual that she denies the very real pain the story associates with the jilting. Hapsy is the central figure in her life, she argues, and the story signifies her rejection of unfaithful and condescending men. Hoefel concludes that "Ellen's final act of blowing out the light is triumphant because defiant, emphasizing that she has recognized her own choices, especially regarding the significance of Hapsy in her life and in her death." ("The Jilting of (Hetero) Sexist Criticism: Porter's Ellen Weatherall and Hapsy," *Studies in Short Fiction*, Winter, 1991)

¹⁰ Hapsy's relationship with Ellen is left remarkably ambiguous in the story. Hoefel (noted above) reads Hapsy as a confidant who might have been the single "sick Negro" Ellen failed to save (she sat up nights "hardly ever losing one.") DeMouy reads Hapsy as a daughter who died during childbirth (hence the image of Hapsy as mother and infant at once). (*KAP's Women*, 52) Thankfully, the story doesn't demand that we take a stand on the specifics of this relationship or how Hapsy died. Ellen's memories do touch on a birth, however: "Yes, John, get the Doctor now, no more talk, my time has come." (CS, 86) This event is associated with Hapsy ("John, get the doctor now, Hapsy's time has come." [CS, 87]) Whether Hapsy was giving birth or being born (I tend to think she was being born for we are told that John died a young man; he would probably not be around to see his grandchildren.) her loss communicates the close relationship between motherhood, birth, and death.

created. But Hapsy is dead (her "time has come"). The image of the dead child as a mother and as an infant expresses the truth that underlying the role and work of the creator is death and loss. Like the shot, pregnant rabbit in "The Grave," this image captures the tragic simultaneity of creation and destruction. The two events of the past, the jilting and the miscarriage, are associated in her imagination because they are the two happenings that cannot be touched by her capacity to create order. The image of Hapsy takes on many forms (a mother, a baby, a woman in a white cap, a "grey gauze") because she is an unknown and free of Granny's motherhood. The only thing Ellen can know is the pain once felt inside her before the birth: "Her breath crowded down under her ribs and grew into a monstrous frightening shape with cutting edges." (CS, 86) She alternates between trying to imaginatively grasp the unknowable, the unattainable, and feeling past pain. The quest for Hapsy is a quest for meaning and the memory of the suffering of experience leads Ellen, ironically, ironically, the ignorance of innocence. "Cornelia, tell Hapsy to take off her cap," she says. "I can't see her plain." (CS, 87)

Granny's death comes upon her as a "surprise," just as many of Porter's initiatory moments do, because nothing she can do prepares her for it. The story traces how her senses try to mediate the widening gap between herself and the physical world around her, and how she relates herself to her past. In the middle there is herself. Between the changing, moving world and the pain of old losses exists the stationary eye which struggles in vain to keep both in check. But gradually she loses touch with those around her ("Cornelia's voice make short turns and tilted over and crashed." [CS, 88]), and the memories infiltrate her private reality so that she confuses Hapsy with one of her grown children. The time before her death is characterized by a distinct lack of control---of her physical creations (the children) and her imaginative ones (her memories).

As the story draws to its conclusion, Granny Weatherall, without leaning on psychological crutches, struggles to rationalize loss in the context of accomplishment. She questions the easy answers she might provide herself (Catholicism, her marriage with John and her family). Up until the very end, she totters on the delicate balance between her instinctive impulse to impose order (and fight off memory) and the need to question and discover something new. She calls the children in from a storm, she makes plans for

the amethyst set, Forty Acres, and wine for Sister Borgia. And yet, "She was so amazed her thoughts ran round and round." (CS, 88) She reaches for her beads, and then for a finger, "something alive." She makes "a long journey outward, looking for Hapsy." (CS, 88) What is she looking for? Her child? George? Christ? Maybe all, maybe none; she is seeking "a sign," a handle on meaning in the face of destruction. Her journey outward is one of the imagination trying to define a portion of order. The creative impulse, however, is limited by ignorance and Ellen's final act communicates the exhilaration of a leap.

The story must end there. It is the thrill of this necessity which brought Porter's fiction into being. She created because life "amazed" and because it did not last forever. Fundamentally, the focus on the initiatory moments of her stories has revealed a tension between the imaginative constructs of order her characters create and the limits of mortality and human weakness. Miranda comes to know the failure of a family myth built around a death, Eugenio's demise becomes the apocalyptic event Laura inevitable drifts towards in her corrupted revolution, and Sophia Jane sees her family disperse around her. Porter's initiations, however, do not dwell on despair. The stories explore the imaginative claiming of experience through the self transformation of moments such as Miranda's discovery of the rabbit, or the mythic banishment Miranda's dream-mind creates after reaching the brink of death. Central to this process is the recognition of limits, the knowledge that the dark and beautiful inspiration of creative work is death. The image of the shot rabbit unifies birth and death, as does the ghostly Hapsy, appearing as a mother and child all at once. Porter's canon, is built on a rock of faith in the artistic mind and its ability to make sense of those forces which threaten order. Often the loss of innocence portrayed in her stories is not an inspiration of helplessness or nostalgia, but an escape from the restrictions of self-ignorance, a means to live more freely and honestly in the knowledge of life's limits. The death of Sophia Jane's husband becomes an empowering event, ushering in an age of matriarchy. Adam's fall and Miranda's resurrection mark the beginning of a life free of war and apocalyptic doom. The corrupted innocence in which Mr. Thompson and Laura remain is not an attribute of purity and virtue, but of a reluctance or inability to embrace experience in the imaginative watershed of an initiation. These stories concentrate on a need Porter saw as intrinsic to

being alive: the need to face life's trials in the spirit of the artist who will sketch her own map, know her own evils, and imaginatively create meaning in the midst change. She captured her characters in the pivotal moments of their sad and exhilarating search for order; their banishments bring destruction or creation, denial or knowledge, but the rendering of experience (the fleeting dream of the initiate, the leap into the unknown, the writing of the story) communicates a faith in the self's endurance, creativity, and generosity. Just as Miranda of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" rejects pity and despair for the "art of the thing," Porter wrote in an awareness of life's restrictions, and as a means of liberation from innocence.

The semi-autobiographical character Miranda of "Old Mortality" is ignorant of what has happened to her because she has yet to write her own version of the family legend; she has yet to achieve her unique perspective. Porter, of course, did so, and she returned to the American South an accomplished artist in 1937. Instead of feeling conspicuous and foreign, she wrote to a friend, she felt profoundly involved in the people with whom she met: "I had no regrets and no wrenchings of the heart for any part of the past. What had been was mine because I really could remember, and now understand, something of what had happened not only to me but to all these people, and I felt myself *part* of a society, and not alien or wanderer at all." (*Letters*, 149). This confidence came from her work as an artist. As "'Noon Wine': The Sources" demonstrates, Porter's writing process was bound up in shaping into story moments of "spiritual enlightenment" in which one suddenly became aware of others. The Amy of "Old Mortality" is also aware of story; she plays the role of romantic heroine, but the script was written by someone else. Ironically, Cousin Eva tells Miranda that her Aunt Amy was "*too free*" to live, when in truth she was not free enough to write her own destiny and realize a faith in her artist-self. Porter's art was a means of achieving such faith. The apocalyptic moments her characters undergo often bring a self knowledge and imaginative ownership of the past, reflecting very much how Porter's own mind grasped experience through writing.

As the mysterious and suspicious death of Aunt Amy testifies, the connection between the thematic trend of initiation in the stories and Porter's artistic mission is finally a moral one. The apocalyptic dialectic between good and evil takes shape ironically in Porter's fiction. Gabriel, the hero, the archangel, runs Miss Lucy into the ground and mistreats his wife. The

devilish Hatch provokes guilt and hatred out of Mr. Thompson, a most unlikely murderer. Miranda in "The Circus" discovers evil under the big top, in the fright of a high-wire clown and the stare of a deformed dwarf. Porter's villains are villains because they destroy order, prevent the "organic" growth of self-knowledge, or exploit human weakness. On the other hand, the searching heroines achieve knowledge and moral soundness in their initiations, in their acceptance of the delicate balance between life and death; they survive and grow through their imaginative revision and ordering of change. There is a beauty of goodness in the "weep, weep, weep" of the tree frogs as Miranda's imagination transforms the death of a chick into the birth of spring. There is the affirmation of order as Sophia Jane and Nannie stitch their quilts, as the Grandmother makes sense of her son's garden, orders a wall to be moved and falls "dead over the dooorsil." There is a moral affirmation in the maternal serenity achieved by Maria Concepcion, who seizes her husband's child, leaving a corpse behind her. Porter's characters inevitably gravitate into her overarching dialectic of order and disorder, creation and destruction, faith and disbelief, which takes on the meaning, ultimately, of good and evil and the moral underpinnings of her artistic credo. She wrote to her nephew in 1942 that

...I have known in life so many strange, wild lost people, some of them very gifted, so many beings trembling a life time between madness and a kind of twilight sanity, such suffering and such cruelty and confusion, I have a good while ago come to the point where I love goodness and simplicity and the desire of the human heart to believe and to love...It seems all too easy to too many people to be "abnormal", irresponsible, evil. A true search for the meanings of things will lead one away from this. (*Letters*, 253)

The forms her personal search took on are the twenty-six short stories we are left with, for "It takes more imagination to be good." (*Letters*, 65) Porter's fiction, essays and letters suggest that the ability to live productively, to do good in the world, is dependent on an autonomy and faith in the self's capacity to imaginatively map the movement and dangers of time, community, cruelty, and sin. Initiation makes manifest the truth of loss. There can be no purpose in death for Ellen Weatherall as she looks at the light, and there can be no knowledge of innocence until Miranda of "Pale

Horse, Pale Rider" faces death. Meaning and self-affirmation is finally not waiting like a bridegroom at the altar or a resurrected Adam. It is to be known only in the transformation of the self, the rush of memory as the image leaps from its grave and brings us full circle to the providence of lost innocence. Writing was a deeply moral enterprise for Porter not because she believed in principles, but because she knew principles did not last. Nor did legends or loyalties or families. But her fiction, as it renders the prototypical passages from innocence to experience, captures a sense of the ongoing struggle between life's trials and the continuity of the artistic mind. Story baptizes the knowing self, inspires a sober faithfulness, a creative power that is goodness. Story knows loss and story lasts, and that is the simple mystery in which Porter lived and worked.

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